

THE GREAT DERANGEMENT: CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE UNTHINKABLE BY AMITAV GHOSH -A BOOK REVIEW

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Amitav Ghosh is one of India's best-known writers. His books include *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines*, *In An Antique Land*, *Dancing in Cambodia*, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Glass Palace*, *Incendiary Circumstances*, *The Hungry Tide*. His most recent novel, *Sea of Poppies*, is the first volume of the *Ibis Trilogy*.

"The Great Derangement" seem to be an insightful provocative engagement with climate change and culture. Ghosh's main concern is to figure out why climate change seems to puzzle the sustained cultural attention and serious political consideration that he thinks it merits. Indeed, he thinks the situation is so dire that the historians of the future will wonder if the humans of the early 21st century were deranged. Ghosh paints the frightening picture he does; it amazes us that this has remained so much in the periphery of our current discourse. . The environmental catastrophe is pen pictured as the author vividly examines and manifests the limits of human thoughts.

Why have most of our writers and artists been so defiant or unable to fit climate change, the collective, and the nonhuman into our literary canon? Ghosh offers an answer by tracing the parallel histories of the novel and carbon economies. The imaginative failure of the literary novel lies with its historic concern with individuals rather than collectives, which is an artifact of a certain kind of carbon-based economy.

The book has three parts of varying strengths: stories, history, and politics. Ghosh is a novelist and the first section depicts it strongest. He tells the relationship between fiction and climate change, the development of realist novel and modernity, the journey of the subject matter of novel from collective to individual, uncanny nature of climate change, reintroduction of unpredictability in human life and other forms of writing that deal with

climate change. In it, Ghosh asks why literature seems incapable of writing about climate change. Why novel is inherently incompatible to deal with this subject. Unlike epics, there is discontinuity of space and time in this novel. The 'setting' of a novel is a self-contained ecosystem and it usually requires a 'period'. This self-containment of novel goes against the vastness of global warming. Global warming isn't limited to a single country. Nor can it be contained in some period of time. Ghosh unravels a lot of interesting things in the first section of the book which is worth the reading

The second part deals with the history of climate change.

The history section is weaker, though it does ask an interesting question: did western colonialism delay the onset of climate change by preventing non-western nations from industrializing?

Unsurprisingly, Ghosh is waylaid by history at every turn, 'entrapped' by it. His ruminations on 'the chronology of global warming' not only evince the redundancy of historical knowledge, but induce paralysis. For, after noting the 'complexity of the history of the carbon economy', he leads us to a conclusion in complete conformity with his historicizing strategy: 'our lives and our choices are unframed in a pattern of history that seems to leave us no-where to turn but toward our self-annihilation'. This is precisely the dilemma of the historicized mind ensnared in a self-incriminating historical situation: history always does, in the end, leave one stranded exactly where one already is. Always it comes too late to make any difference

The implications that he draws from that history, however, are both morally challenging and unrealistic. At other times, the sentiments are overwrought: "The event of today's changing climate, in that they represent the totality of human actions over time, represent also the terminus of history..." Apart from dealing with the shocking effects of climate change on Asia, he tells why Western concept of modernity is impracticable here. The early modern era nurtured modernity, from different parts of the world. The usage of natural gas in China about a thousand years ago, the inception of oil industry from Burma, the early coal industry in India, all of these things show Asia was modernizing in its own way. But the global south was not allowed to take its own course and colonialism

hampered the progress in those areas. It was only after colonialism, in 1980s, industrialization took place in those areas but it also brought climate change along with it. It can be said colonialism delayed climate crisis, but it was the eventual outcome of that kind of modernization. This is why the question of climate justice is discussed in conferences on climate change.

The third part deals with the politics of climate change. There is denialism of climate change in Anglo sphere, as those countries are getting most benefits from the policies which are accelerating climate crisis. Climate change can only be tackled by moving from individual to collective approach. But there are reservations that climate change politics can be used for imperial designs, as it can provide a pretext to interfere in the matters of other countries and the maintenance of status quo is always a priority of the imperial world. In the final section we see the combination of the strengths and weaknesses of the preceding sections. There are many striking insights here, particularly about the nature and shortcomings of modernity. They are essentially historicizing contemporary democratic ideas of freedom and the individual as mere products of carbon that are no longer plausible.

Mulling about the preparedness (or the lack of it) of a mega city such as Mumbai to tackle the effects of climate change, Ghosh concentrates more on the preventive rather than the post mortem efficiency. Bringing the reader to the fact that the acts of reclamation and usurpation of space from the seas have put the city of Mumbai in a perilous position viz-a-viz a probable natural disaster in the form of a Force 4 or 5 Cyclone, the author proceeds to detail the inefficient preventive measures that are currently in place for avoiding a catastrophe of gigantic proportions. He also lays the blame on unscrupulous real estate developers who harrumph the luxuries of plots and condominiums that boast a magnificent sea front view to boost the value of properties when in reality these structures of opulence would be the ones that would be directly in the path of destruction of a venomous tsunami or a remorseless cyclone

It will for sure look back startlingly at the anodyne and inane idiosyncrasies of a populace that stood by their attitudes of tepidity and stupidity instead of heeding to an umpteen

number of timely warnings that was delivered to them by Mother Nature.

This admirable book is the latest testament to the limits of contemporary thought and language; to the frustration of human cognitive power over a world we thought we knew.

In deed it is worth a reading!

In summary, The Great Derangement serves as a clarion call for all the 'denialists' of climate change who instead of facing up to the real and present threat of global warming, bury their heads into the sands of complacency and callousness. This Ostrich like behaviour in the opinion of Amitav Ghosh will only ensure to blacken and blotch our maturity and sensibility in the eyes of a future generation

Worth reading and enlightening one!